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ABSTRACT

This guide is designed to provide elementary school teachers with safe learning activities concerning bees and wasps. The following topics are included: (1) the importance of a positive teacher attitude towards bees and wasps; (2) special problems posed by paper wasps; (3) what to do when a child is bothered by a wasp; (4) what to do if a wasp lands on a child; (5) how to remove an uninvited bee or wasp from the classroom; (6) first aid for stings; (7) ways to discourage unwanted contact with bees; and (8) activities for observing bees and wasps. (JW)

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SAFETY WITH WASPS AND BEES

by

Erla Hackett

PLEASE REMEMBER - MOST STINGS ARE ACCIDENTS AND CAN BE AVOIDED.

DISCLAIMER - The following information has worked for me. It is largely based on my personal interest in honeybees and wasps and my observations of them with children. If you follow this advice, I expect you will be seldom bothered by these insects.

IF YOU ARE, OR SUSPECT YOU ARE, ALLERGIC TO BEE OR WASP STINGS, USE THIS INFORMATION TO KEEP YOURSELF SAFE. LET SOMEONE ELSE ACT ON BEHALF OF THE CHILD.

YOUR ROLE - Make an effort to learn the difference in the appearances of paper wasps and honeybees because they behave very differently. YOU can be more relaxed and positive in your actions if you know which insect you are dealing with. It is your attitude that reassures the child, not just your words.

The role you work toward, as parent or teacher, is to act in a confident and matter-of-fact manner when these insects are around.

You are winning when you can say to a crying child bothered by a wasp while finishing a hotdog,
"She wants your hotdog. Come on, last bite and I'll help you wash up."
Panic and tears disappear. You have given a positive suggestion and indicated your willingness to take a part.

PAPER WASPS - Paper wasps are the biggest hazzard. In San Francisco, most stings are from wasps and blamed on honeybees because of the similarity in their appearance. The confusion is increased by the many references, mostly cartoon, that indicate honey in paper wasp nests.

Wasps are often found around food or garbage. They are very fond of meats, fresh, raw, cooked or cured. They will even, on occasion, gather peanut butter. They prefer meat to sweet drinks but will enjoy a soda also, usually on a hot day.

Wasps are usually a seasonal problem. They are very active in the late spring and summer.

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WHEN A CHILD IS BOTHERED BY A WASP

Remove any attractive food the child is holding.

Move the child away from a site of wasp food gathering (garbage can, picnic table, fallen sandwich etc.).

Move the child away from any nesting site (bush, tree, building eave etc.).

Wipe the child's face and fingers to remove the scent of any attractive food.

Even a hot, sweaty, not too clean child can attract a wasp.

If a wasp is too persistant, help the child to a place the wasp can't get. It should loose interest in a few minutes.

If the problem occurs indoors, move the child away from windows and light. Put the wasp on the defensive with a moving sheet of paper and it will probably fly to a window.

IF A WASP LANDS

Brush a wasp away, don't swat it.

Wasps do anger and can sting more than once. The stinger is not barbed and will not break off in the skin.

WASPS OR BEES IN THE ROOM

If a wasp or bee accidentally flies into the room, she will usually go to the light or the window. They navigate with polarized light and will be confused and disoriented indoors.

Move children away from windows, doors, and lights.

Have them watch quietly while you help the "poor wasp/bee" find her way home.

Close doors to lighted interior rooms first. Then open your outside doors or windows and turn off your lights. When the insect calms down and recognizes where the sun is, she will leave.

Cloud cover does not eliminate polarized light so this will work on a cloudy day but may take a little longer.

WASP STINGS - (Check your First Aid Guide for up to date material.)

A quickly applied paste of unflavored meat tenderizer and water works well. It should be applied before the body naturally closes over the puncture.

Ice packs are soothing.

Be sure to notify the parent. Allergic people can be increasingly sensitive to stings and while there may be no reaction to the first sting, a subsequent one may prove serious.

HONEYBEES Honeybee stings occur most often when a bee is stepped on or handled accidently. They are busy with repetitive tasks and are not interested in people as a rule.

BEE SENSE - ITIVITY

If the honeybees are foraging on grass level flowers, keep your shoes on.

Use cups instead of canned drinks so an "inhabited" can is not brought to the lip.

Serve "bee-attractive" foods in small quantities that can be quickly consumed (1/2 a juice bar, 1/4 apple etc.) Naturally foraging bees would not be interested picnic site bees can view your lunch as part of their forage area.

Bees are interested in some yellows and blues that are very intense for them. These colors seem to be from some aniline dyes on synthetic fibers. If a child is being bothered for no reason that you can see, and they are wearing these colors or a new white synthetic fiber T-shirt, try to change the garment or cover it.

Flower-like patterns in vivid colors can cause a bee to check out a child's clothing too.

BEE STINGS Treat the same as a wasp sting but, because the bee has a barbed stinger, the stinger and venom sac are pulled from the bee's body. The bee cannot free her stinger and will not live long after. Act quickly to remove the stinger and venom sac. Reflex movements cause continued venom injection.

I try to pull the skin tight and smoothly work the stinger out and up without squeezing the venom sac.

Again - be sure to notify the parent.

ACTIVITIES WITH WASPS

Hang a piece of ham or bacon outside a window that is out of the general traffic pattern. Have the children watch from inside to see the wasps snip the meat into a neat roll that they can carry back to the nest.

If a nest is begun on the window, cover the area with black paper. Later, switch to red plastic or cellophane for interior observation. Put back the black paper when not watching.

If a nest is begun in the yard or near by, enjoy it. Observe the approach patterns. If it is hazardous to people, hose it down at dusk and watch the next few days to see it is not rebuilt. If it does not interfer with the children, let it grow to 3 or 4 inches in diameter. Most of the time ants will destroy it and you will have an intact nest to look at. If they don't, hose it down before it gets larger.

If wasps are present, maybe around garbage cans, on an outing, put a small piece (1/2 in. square) of meat out away from people. When the wasps are busy with the meat, organize the children in small groups to watch the snipping and rolling process.

ACTIVITIES WITH BEES

Honeybees are safe to watch closely while they are working. Three or four students, below the level of the flowers, or to one side, allows the bee freedom to leave.

Look at the mouth parts, pollen baskets, and pollen clinging to fine hairs on her body. All workers are female. The stinger is a modified egg laying part. Some children need to be reminded that a sting is not a bite.

Notice that bees visiting clover visit only clover and bees visiting daisies visit only daisies. How can they tell? Do they make mistakes? How long does it take for them to notice a mistake?

If your children are interested, mark the thorax of one with a small dot of paint (red) or bright nail polish. The bee will go back to the hive and return to the same area. You can find her again. Once we found another bee with red feet. She must have stepped on her sister back at the hive.

Bees feeding near a window will come to jam on the window sill. They can be conditioned to come only at a certain time, or to a colored square, or only when the square is out. They are really most amazing.